

Reconstruction of Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center and Horseman's Park

**County of Los Angeles
Department of Parks and Recreation
Planning and Development Agency**

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Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center and Horseman's Park (Center)

The Center is located at 12191 Rooks Road, Whittier, CA 90016 and covers approximately 28-acres of Whittier Narrows Recreation Area which is operated and maintained by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (Department). The land is owned by the Army Corps of Engineers under lease to the County of Los Angeles. The Center is operated by a concessionaire under contract with the County. The facility offers equestrian boarding with support services, an equestrian staging area, arenas and trail access along the San Gabriel River and connecting to a larger trail network in Los Angeles County.

Redesign and Reconstruction of the Center

Most people agree that improvements are necessary to modernize the Center as well as provide new infrastructure to make the overall site more environmentally sustainable. Further, these improvements should be planned and carried out in a comprehensive and well thought-out manner—not a piecemeal approach. This comprehensive approach is required by state environmental regulations and to secure potential sources of funding (e.g. state and local bond funds, grants and County general fund tax dollars) for construction. The final building plans will meet current building and safety code requirements. Other mandatory issues include stormwater run-off management, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations, traffic and pedestrian safety, flood control, and fire and life safety.

The planning process is divided into two phases. **Phase 1 - Preliminary Planning to Upgrade the Center** includes planning and technical studies and identifies in broad terms the features and improvements that need to be included in the new project. The planning phase allows users and Department field staff to set recreational and operational priorities. This phase includes identifying technical solutions to particular issues such as stormwater pollution, habitat restoration and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, path of travel. For stormwater management, for example, berms, swales, or other surface water controls and treatment be incorporated throughout the plan.

Phase 2 - Architect and Engineer Designs and Final Construction Drawings

is where the conceptual features mentioned above are refined and building and site dimensions and measurements are drawn on construction plans. These plans are essential to deriving an estimate of construction costs, confirming whether adequate funding is available.

Project Activities to Date

In the mid 2000's many private and public equestrian facilities were closing throughout the San Gabriel Valley because they were old and in need of repair and many operators did not have the resources to address various code enforcement violations. Instead of addressing the infrastructure issues, many opted to close their doors.

The Whittier Narrows Recreation Area has a rich history of equestrian use and continues to be a focus of critical importance for multi-use trail recreation along the San Gabriel River.

Understanding what was occurring in the San Gabriel Valley and sensitive to the need to preserve an important recreation amenity in the region, the Department began an effort to examine the needs of the Center.

In December of 2007, the Department initially hosted a walk through meeting at the Center and invited staff from the First Supervisorial District, Chief Executive Office, Department of Public Works and Flood Control District, Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, as well as the Department's Regional Parks Operating Agency, Planning and Development Agency, Contracts Division and the Concessionaire who is under contract to operate the Center.

From January to September of 2008, the Department held various technical advisory/stakeholders meetings to develop a comprehensive scope of work for possible improvements to the Center. Participants included many of those entities listed above, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers which owns the property.

From October to December 2008, the Department held two meetings with community and equestrian members to provide input and refine the scope of work from a user perspective.

In October 2008, the Department submitted a grant application to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy requesting funding for the Plan.

In May, 2009 the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy awarded a grant for \$570,000 to the Department for the development of the Plan. The grant was awarded with conditions for matching funds from the County.

Shortly thereafter the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy informed the Department that due to State of California budgetary issues, all bond funding allocation was frozen; subsequently this project had to be placed on hold.

Almost a year and a half later, in October, 2010 the State released the bond funding allowing the grant process to move forward. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors then approved acceptance of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy grant.

From October, 2010 to May, 2011 the Department held a solicitation process, in conjunction with the Department of Public Works, for as-needed consultants and the First Supervisorial District committed the \$570,000 in matching funds to continue with the project.

In November, 2011 the Department engaged Withers & Sandgren, a landscape architecture and environmental planning firm with expertise in equestrian center design to complete the Center's Phase 1 - Preliminary Planning to Upgrade the Center.

Community Workshops

In 2008, the County initiated workshops to engage the community and equestrian enthusiasts in setting priority goals to develop clear proposals to obtain funding and/or grants to proceed with conceptual planning and, ultimately, construction of new facilities.

- In October 2008, public workshop attendees provided specific input on priority improvements to include in future project planning.
- In December 2008, the public participated in a follow-up workshop to refine the top priorities identified in October and set a scope of work to address site flooding, impacts to the River, upgrades to the equestrian buildings and ways to create more environmentally-sustainable equestrian recreational services.

Phase 1 - Preliminary Planning to Upgrade the Center

The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy awarded the County vital funds specifically for planning, environmental analysis and new equestrian building design. Besides the restriction on use of the grant only for planning, the grant included further community outreach. Withers & Sandgren (the Department's landscape architects and environmental consultants), began the planning process in November 2011 and held two community input meetings.

The consultants have completed the preliminary site and building designs, as well as required environmental studies (special plant and animal habitat areas) and stormwater flooding prevention plans.

Numerous designs and reports are required for proposed developments of this size and complexity, particularly within the environmentally sensitive area of the San Gabriel River basin. These are the required reports that the consultants completed on time in August 2012 for the Center's Preliminary Planning for Upgrades:

- Cultural resource survey
- Soils report
- Hydrology and hydraulics study and report
- Geo-technical report
- Conceptual grading plan
- Biological report
- Conceptual storm-water design
- Habitat restoration plan
- Adjacency and connectivity (trails) plan
- Topographic survey
- CEQA Environmental Assessments of the Conceptual Designs
- Emergency Plan
- Health & safety plan
- ADA – accessibility analysis
- Conceptual utility plans
- Plant palette
- Best Management Practices – Stormwater prevention

Phase 2 - Architect and Engineer Designs and Final Construction Drawings

This phase of the upgrade project will ultimately result in final construction drawings that will be used by the general contractor to build the new Center. Importantly, this phase includes formulating a seamless relocation “strategy” for current equestrian boarders, trail and arena users. These important steps have been set in motion:

- **September 17, 2012:** the Department will host a community meeting to get feedback on the preliminary site and building designs from Phase 1.
- **November, 2012:** the Department will hold a community meeting to present final designs.
- **December, 2012:** the Department will receive revised project cost estimates and the consultants will begin preparing construction drawings.

Additional project updates and timelines will be posted on the website as they become available. The County anticipates the following project milestones:

1. Obtain project approvals from state and federal agencies.
2. Obtain grading, building and other required permits.
3. Develop and implement a funding strategy specifically targeted for construction of the new Center.
4. Formulate a relocation plan for temporary boarding and staging during construction of the Center.
5. Initiate the bid process for contractors.
6. Project ground breaking and begin construction.
7. The project is completed—ribbon cutting!

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